

# AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK



Preliminary General Plan  
Draft Environmental Impact Report  
March 2008



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**Cover photo: Gazos Beach as viewed from Franklin Point.**

# AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK

(incorporates Año Nuevo State Natural Reserve)

## Preliminary General Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report

SCH# 2003102088 (State Park)

SCH# 2003102089 (State Natural Reserve)

March 2008

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Photo on reverse: Franklin Point, Año Nuevo State Natural Reserve

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

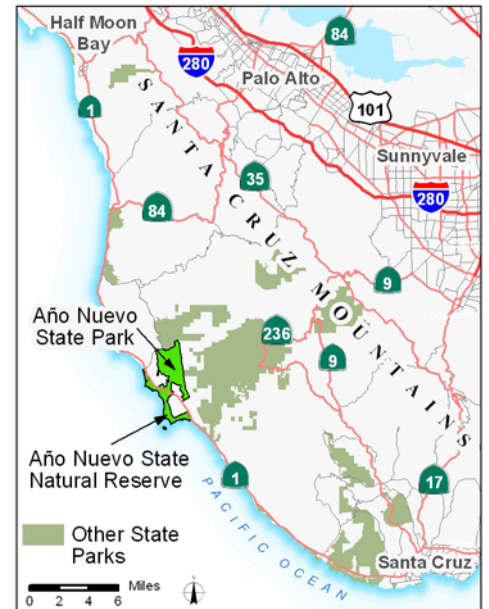
## Park Description

Año Nuevo State Natural Reserve and Año Nuevo State Park are located in San Mateo County, approximately 25 miles south of Half Moon Bay and 25 miles north of Santa Cruz. These parks are in the Santa Cruz Mountains region and are within 65 miles of the major metropolitan centers of San Jose, San Francisco and Oakland. State Highway 1 provides primary public access to both park units.

These state park and state natural reserve lands protect environmentally diverse segments of California's central coast. The State Natural Reserve, on the coastal side of Highway 1, consists of approximately 1,300 acres of marine terrace, sandy dunes and beaches, rocky coastline, and Año Nuevo Island. The State Natural Reserve, partly managed as a Wildlife Protection Area, is the site of a major breeding colony of the northern elephant seal and the focus of a popular interpretive program and tour. The State Park consists of approximately 2,900 acres on the inland side of Highway 1 and public use or park facilities have not been established yet. The park is a part of the western slope of the Santa Cruz Mountains and contains uplands characterized by second-growth redwood and Douglas-fir forests, oaks, chaparral, and pine on rugged terrain, with mountain streams flowing through canyons on their way to the sea. These units also contain significant cultural resources that include historic ranch complexes, a coastal light station, and a Native California Indian village site. Recreation activities that currently occur along the coast include wildlife observation and hiking. Formal access to inland park areas has not been established yet. The Año Nuevo parks are among the forty-five parks most representative parks in the the State Parks System (SPS) that support the ecological values of the ten ecoregions in California.

## Purpose for the General Plan

Although Año Nuevo SNR was included in the 1979 general plan for San Mateo coast park units, there has not been a comprehensive planning examination of both state reserve and state park lands. Such an examination include would evaluations of the incremental growth in size of the park, diversity of resources, recreation needs and opportunities, operational efficiencies, and connectivity with surrounding



Año Nuevo is an easy day-trip from the San Francisco, San Jose, and Oakland metropolitan areas.





natural lands. The inland Cascade Ranch was acquired in 1985 and was classified and named Año Nuevo State Park on January 14, 1999 in order to allow for consideration of recreation opportunities and park development, such as camping, which would not have been allowed if it was an addition to the existing State Natural Reserve. Recognition of these and other issues prompted the preparation of this general plan, which provides a long-term management approach and a planning framework for these two units. One result of this planning process is the recommendation that Año Nuevo State Park and State Natural Reserve be combined into a single state park unit as presented by this general plan.

### Regional Planning Context

This plan was developed by California State Parks as part of a regional planning effort, along with general plans for Big Basin Redwoods State Park and Butano State Park. These four parks not only are in proximity to each other; they share natural, cultural, recreation, and visitor demographic characteristics, and face similar issues. The regional characteristics and common issues were researched at the beginning of the planning process and are used as a foundation for the three resulting park plans. The General Plan process also recognized each park's unique assets and needs separately. The three plans recognize the close relationship between California State Park units and other nearby public lands, and emphasize the potential for regional collaboration in resource management, recreational use, education and interpretation, and park management.

For each plan, park issues and opportunities were identified, and goals and guidelines developed as part of this regional planning approach. Planning zones were created for each park to assist in shaping appropriate management strategies and addressing projected levels of visitor use. Six planning zones were developed for Año Nuevo State Park. The six Año Nuevo SP planning zones are described in the matrix at the end of this Executive Summary.

### Key Issues and Opportunities

The following are the primary planning issues addressed by the general plan:

- Combining Año Nuevo State Park and Año Nuevo State Natural Reserve into a single State Park unit: The amount of land in state park ownership has grown in the Año Nuevo vicinity as acquisition opportunities

The Año Nuevo, Big Basin, and Butano State Park general plans emphasize the close relationship and potential for collaboration between these park units and other nearby public lands.



have occurred over the 49 years since the original state reserve acquisition. The amount and diversity of natural, cultural, and scenic resources on state park lands has expanded significantly beyond the elephant seals and coastal habitats of the original park acquisition. Although the elephant seal tours are among the State Park System's most popular natural resource attractions, visitors do not fully recognize the broad range of the park's resources, available lands, and connections to regional trail networks. Furthermore, the potential recreation and interpretation opportunities that would provide visitor awareness and appreciation of these resources have not been fully explored or realized. Park development, operations and maintenance have also evolved in an incremental manner to respond to specific management circumstances and issues as the state park land ownership has grown. Combining the State Natural Reserve and the State Park would support expanded visitor experiences and orientation with a broader regional perspective toward visitor recreation opportunities and collaborative natural lands management. The coastal dune habitat and wildlife will be protected and managed in a designated Natural Preserve. The consolidation under one unit name would emphasize the historic links in ownership between the properties and avoid visitor confusion when trying to locate or contact the park. The consolidation would also improve park operations, resource management and protection, and future public access and visitor needs.

- **Recreation Demand and Visitor Opportunities:** The proximity of Año Nuevo State Park to the nearby high density urban centers of Santa Clara Valley and the Bay Area can help serve a high regional demand for outdoor recreation. There is potential for enhancing and diversifying current recreational activities along the coast, as well as providing new recreation opportunities in the inland portions of Año Nuevo State Park where formal park access and facilities have not yet been established. Links and partnerships between Año Nuevo and other surrounding regional natural areas will play an important role in providing even more diversified and accessible recreational activities as well as expanded recreational opportunities for a large nearby urban population.
- **Public Access and Circulation:** Existing access and circulation have increased as ownership and visitor use have evolved. Improving access to and within the

consolidated park units and enhancing regional connections was a significant aspect of this planning effort. This general plan's proposal to combine the State Natural Reserve and State Park units provides an opportunity to improve and coordinate circulation and visitor safety, as well as assure integration with regional natural lands access and trail networks.

- **Regional Planning Approach:** Año Nuevo State Park is surrounded by several State Park System units as well as other natural, recreational, and historic properties, such as Cascade Ranch Historic Farm, Cloverdale Coastal Ranches, Coast Dairies, and Mid-peninsula Regional Open Space District lands. The proximity of these properties and the similarity of natural, cultural, recreational, and interpretive resources provide opportunities to manage these lands in a coordinated and integrated way. This general plan emphasizes and supports the regional, recreational, natural, and cultural values of the parks and surrounding public lands. Furthermore, the general plan also encourages that the State Parks take a leadership role in regional collaborative efforts in these areas.
- **Preservation of Environmentally Sensitive Areas:** There are significant environmentally sensitive areas with distinctive landscapes that warrant special protection and management. In recognition and response to these special park features, this general plan establishes a Natural Preserve to protect coastal habitats and wildlife. The general plan also establishes a Cultural Preserve to protect a culturally significant valley in the inland portion of the park.

### **Key Proposals and Planning Concepts**

The general plan merges the two existing park units into a single multi-faceted park. The general plan highlights the abundant diversity of park and recreation features and central California coastal visitor experiences beyond the popularity of the elephant seal tours at Año Nuevo Point. The general plan improves and expands protection of park resources; provides park improvements that enhance current and future coastal visitor recreational uses; establishes new visitor access and recreation opportunities to the park's inland areas; and provides for improved park operations and management. New Natural Preserve and Cultural Preserve sub-classification designations provide increased protection for special areas of the park. Key general plan concepts and proposals include:

The plan merges Año Nuevo SNR and SP into one state park unit, and provides increased protection for special areas by designating a cultural preserve and a natural preserve.



### *Plan Concepts*

- Preserve the wild, natural, and rural character of the Año Nuevo coast and the Santa Cruz Mountains backcountry.
- Integrate the planning, preservation, visitor opportunities, interpretation, park management, and operation of Año Nuevo State Natural Reserve and Año Nuevo State Park into one unified and multi-faceted park unit.
- Collaborate with area partners and have State Parks take a leadership role on Santa Cruz Mountains-San Mateo Coast regional efforts for natural lands management, sensitive resource protection and habitat linkages, recreation, trail networks, and education and interpretation. Explore acquisitions from willing sellers for these same purposes as land becomes available.
- In response to California's demographic trends, where possible provide group day use picnic and camping facilities, indoor overnight accommodations such as cabins or yurts, RV campsites, and ADA-compliant recreational facilities.
- Continue to locate the majority of park improvements and new development at or near the existing ranch complexes and along/near the State Highway 1 corridor which is the primary access route to the park. Park improvements and programs are to be compatible with the historic character of the ranch complexes. Reduce park development as the distance from the ranch complexes and highway increases.
- Incorporate sustainable design principles into the design, development, operations, and maintenance of park facilities and programs.
- Improve park circulation and access for vehicles, pedestrians, equestrians, and bicycles. Work with local transit agencies to expand park access via mass-transit and multi-modal transportation systems.
- Minimize sensitive resource impacts while expanding recreation opportunities.

### *Plan Proposals*

- Reclassify Año Nuevo SNR and Año Nuevo SP and combine them into a single State Park unit.
- Replace the existing Wildlife Protection Area (434 acres). Designate a Natural Preserve sub-classification (800 acres) and expand protection of coastal wildlife, habitats, and park resources.

Important plan concepts include preserving the wild, natural and rural character of the area, and continuing to locate the majority of park improvements and new development near Highway 1 or near the existing ranch complexes.

Proposals include allowing for appropriate adaptive use of the historic buildings while preserving their character, continued use of the Dickerman-Steele Ranch complex as the primary visitor services area, and development of inland day-use parking and trailhead facilities at Lake Elizabeth.

- Establish a Cultural Preserve (225 acres) in the Quiroste Valley to preserve and protect the unique cultural resources, landscape setting, and Native California Indian heritage.
- Preserve and maintain the historic character of the Dickerman-Steele Ranch and Cascade Ranch complexes. Allow for appropriate adaptive uses.
- Continue the Dickerman-Steele Ranch complex as the park's primary visitor orientation, interpretation, and activity center.
- Improve and expand park visitor facilities, experiences, access, and trails.
- Develop day use parking and trailhead facilities at Lake Elizabeth to establish visitor access into the inland areas and the Santa Cruz Mountains region.
- Provide new trailhead access and potential day uses facilities and/or an operations maintenance facility south of the Cascade Ranch.
- Connect State Park lands to regional trail systems and destinations, including the California Coastal Trail.
- Continue to survey for special status plant and animal species, and implement appropriate management techniques to protect those species.
- Provide greater cultural resource protection and interpretation at Quiroste Valley.
- Improve park services and operations efficiency through interagency and intra-district cooperation and sharing of personnel and resources. This may include operations facilities in the vicinity of Cascade Ranch.
- Provide trailside camping and alternative overnight visitor opportunities such as enroute camping and indoor overnight accommodations such as yurts in the inland areas of the park where appropriate.
- Continue wildlife research activities at Año Nuevo Island.
- Work with federal, state, and local agencies to provide effective and efficient regional natural resource management including DFG's Wildlife Action Plan's recommendations for the Central Coast Region and the Marine Region

A more detailed list of Plan Proposals is in described in Section 5.3.

## Management Plans

Some of the goals and guidelines comprising the Park Plan (Chapter 4) suggest the preparation of specific management

plans and more detailed site investigations. These include the following:

- Vegetation Management Statement
- Wildfire Management Plan
- Prescribe Fire Plan
- Watershed Management Plan
- Roads and Trails Management Plan
- Scope of Collections Statement
- Interpretive Plans and Exhibit Plans
- Historic Structures Reports and Cultural Landscape Reports
- Conservation Plan and treatment guidelines for the Steele Family/Chinese Workers' Cemetery.

### **Tiered CEQA Environmental Analysis**

This General Plan/Final EIR serves as a first-tier Environmental Impact Report, as defined in Section 15166 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. The environmental analysis is programmatic in scope and serves as a first tier EIR. Tiering is a process where a lead agency prepares a series of environmental documents, progressing from general concerns to more site-specific evaluations with the preparation of each new document (CEQA Guidelines Section 15152). The Environmental Analysis does not contain project-specific analysis for the facilities that are considered in the general plan but analyzes broad environmental matters and is a reference for future environmental documents that will provide more detailed information and analysis for site specific developments and projects.

This General Plan/Final EIR provides discussion of the probable impacts of future development and established goals, policies, and objectives to implementing such development in a manner which will avoid or minimize such environmental impacts. This approach is consistent with a tiered approach to EIRs.

The general plan also includes guidelines that govern future project-level environmental review of site-specific projects to avoid or minimize potential adverse site-specific effects to resources during construction or operation of the facilities and improvements. Specific projects would also undergo subsequent CEQA review as appropriate. Because the general plan contains goals and guidelines that are designed to avoid or minimize potential adverse environmental effects, no significant program-level impacts were identified.



AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK - PLANNING ZONE MATRIX						
	Entrance & Interpretive Center Zone	Wildlife & Dune Protection Zone	Cascade Ranch Zone	Lake Elizabeth Zone	Quiroste Valley Zone	Backcountry Zone
Area Description	<p>This zone is characterized by a flat coastal terrace, a ravine, and bluffs. Unique resources include historic structures and sensitive plant and animal species. Located in the southern coastal portion of the park, it serves as the primary park entrance and parking area for visitor access, orientation &amp; interpretation at the Dickerman-Steele Ranch complex that includes elephant seal tours and interpretive programs at the Visitor Center.</p>	<p>This zone includes the coastal area west of the highway, characterized by a coastal bluff, sand dunes, a rocky shoreline, pocket beaches, a broad sandy beach, and also includes the relatively flat and rocky Año Nuevo Island. Much of this coastal zone is currently designated as a Wildlife Protection Area.</p>	<p>This zone encompasses the Cascade Ranch complex located east of State Highway 1 in the southern portion of Año Nuevo SP. The ranch is divided into two ownerships, State Parks and the private-owned Cascade Ranch Historic Farm properties. The ranch forms a part of California State Historic Landmark #906 and appears eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.</p>	<p>This zone is located adjacent to State Highway 1 between Cascade Ranch to the south and Whitehouse Road to the north. The Lake Elizabeth Zone is characterized by annual grasslands on flat terrain and gentle coastal slopes and riparian scrub vegetation surrounding Lake Elizabeth, an agricultural irrigation reservoir, and its associated drainage.</p>	<p>The Quiroste Valley is a secluded valley of annual grasslands and coyote brush surrounded by forested hills located in the western foothills of the park along the north side of Whitehouse Road.</p>	<p>The Backcountry consists of the more remote uplands areas of the park, characterized by forested mountains, rolling hills covered with grass and chaparral, and riparian canyons with lush undergrowth and large trees. Its northern boundary consists of a linear corridor along Gazos Creek adjacent to Butano SP. The Backcountry is also contiguous to Big Basin Redwoods SP on the east.</p>
Resource Character & Management (Carrying Capacity Objective)	<p>Due to its location with direct access from Hwy. 1, facilities in this zone will continue to serve as the main park entrance and provide visitor orientation, education, and interpretation for the park. It will be managed to provide a variety of recreation and interpretive opportunities and services, while ensuring the protection and preservation of significant historic resources within the Dickerman-Steele Ranch complex.</p>	<p>The Wildlife &amp; Dune Protection Zone will be managed primarily to protect and preserve the unique terrestrial and marine wildlife and natural and cultural resources while providing visitor access, education, and interpretation. Most of this coastal zone will be designated as a Natural Preserve, except for an appropriate buffer zone along the highway and adjacent coastal farmlands.</p>	<p>The Cascade Ranch contains historic ranch structures including residences, outbuildings, barn, and a cemetery. The Cascade Ranch Zone, in cooperation with Cascade Ranch Historic Farm, will be managed primarily for historic and cultural landscape values and interpretive potential. The site will also offer trailhead parking for access into the Backcountry, staff housing, and compatible maintenance functions. Modern improvements should be compatible with historic character and treatment guidelines.</p>	<p>The Lake Elizabeth Zone will be managed primarily for visitor access, recreational use, and natural resource protection.</p>	<p>The Quiroste Valley will be managed as an area of unique cultural resources, with provisions for public access, cultural resource preservation and interpretation, special events, and appropriate visitor use. Most of this inland valley will be designated as a Cultural Preserve. Planning zone areas outside the Cultural Preserve will be a natural lands buffer area.</p>	<p>The Backcountry will be managed primarily to preserve its natural, cultural, and scenic resources and sense of solitude, and provide access and resource connectivity with adjacent Big Basin and Butano State Parks.</p>





AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK - PLANNING ZONE MATRIX (DRAFT)

	Entrance & Interpretive Center Zone	Wildlife & Dune Protection Zone	Cascade Ranch Zone	Lake Elizabeth Zone	Quiroste Valley Zone	Backcountry Zone
Visitor Experiences (Carrying Capacity Objective)	<p>Visitors experience distinctive natural and cultural resources through nature hikes, exhibits, lectures, and videos at the visitor center-historic ranch complex. Trails will provide visitors of all ability levels access to the wildlife, landscapes, and historic features of the area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ High to medium level of use</li><li>▪ Frequent contact with others</li></ul>	<p>Hikers and organized tour groups can observe the elephant seal rookery and explore the wild coastline and dune habitats. An ADA accessible boardwalk and viewing deck are provided. Seasonal use periods contribute to the remote character of the wild coast.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Low to high use is controlled by organized tours</li><li>▪ Low to moderate frequency of contact with others</li></ul>	<p>Visitors will access and enjoy the remaining features of the historically important Cascade Ranch and understand the rancher’s way of life in the traditional agriculture and dairy industries along the coast.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Low to moderate use</li><li>▪ Low to moderate frequency of contact with others</li></ul>	<p>Visitors will experience spectacular views of forested mountains and rolling brush- and grass-covered foothills to the east and the coast to the west. Visitors will find relaxation, wildlife viewing, trail access, and enroute camping opportunities at this location.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Medium level of use</li><li>▪ Moderate frequency of contact with others</li></ul>	<p>Visitors will be able to experience and learn about native California Indian culture and history through living history programs, workshops, and special events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Low level to moderate use</li><li>▪ Low to moderate frequency of contact with others</li><li>▪ High frequency of contact and use during special events</li></ul>	<p>Hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians can explore the park on an extensive trail system and connect with the region’s network of multi-use trails to venture into the surrounding Santa Cruz Mountains and coastal areas. A low level of use contributes to the remote character of the Backcountry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Low level of use</li><li>▪ Infrequent contact with others</li></ul>
Visitor Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Orientation, education, and interpretation of the park</li><li>▪ Contact with park staff and volunteers</li><li>▪ Group staging for guided hiking tours of the elephant seal rookery</li><li>▪ Trailheads &amp; trails</li><li>▪ Picnicking</li><li>▪ No overnight use</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Elephant seal tours and wildlife viewing</li><li>▪ Hiking on designated trails</li><li>▪ Scientific research</li><li>▪ Vehicles are directed to authorized roads and trails outside the Natural Preserve</li><li>▪ No fishing at Gazos Creek &amp; Beach (in accordance with Marine Life Protection Act)</li><li>▪ No overnight use</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Interpretive programs &amp; special events focus on the historic ranch setting and cultural history</li><li>▪ Picnicking</li><li>▪ Group day use activities</li><li>▪ Hiking, biking, and equestrian trail access to Cascade Falls and Lake Elizabeth</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Trailhead staging</li><li>▪ Hiking, biking, and equestrian trail access to Santa Cruz Mountains regional trails and Cascade Ranch</li><li>▪ Enroute camping</li><li>▪ No lake recreation allowed (in accordance with water rights agreements)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Interpretive programs &amp; special events focused on native California Indian culture &amp; village life</li><li>▪ Hiking, biking, and equestrian trail access</li><li>▪ Primitive trailside camping or alternative overnight accommodations</li><li>▪ No motorized equipment or vehicles unless required for health &amp; safety, park maintenance, or special events</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Hiking, biking, and equestrian trail access to Santa Cruz Mountains regional trails</li><li>▪ Primitive trailside camping</li></ul>
Range of Appropriate Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Rehabilitated historic structures adapted for appropriate uses</li><li>▪ Visitor center</li><li>▪ Restrooms</li><li>▪ Vehicular parking</li><li>▪ Elephant seal tour staging areas</li><li>▪ Orientation &amp; interpretive elements</li><li>▪ Trailheads &amp; trails</li><li>▪ Picnic sites</li><li>▪ Scenic view points</li><li>▪ Park offices</li><li>▪ Staff housing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Trailheads, trails &amp; boardwalks</li><li>▪ Scenic view points</li><li>▪ Interpretive elements</li><li>▪ Facilities outside of Preserve:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Vehicular parking</li><li>- School group staging area</li><li>- Staff housing</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Rehabilitated historic structures adapted for appropriate uses</li><li>▪ Staff housing</li><li>▪ Restrooms</li><li>▪ Vehicular parking</li><li>▪ Trailheads &amp; trails</li><li>▪ Interpretive elements</li><li>▪ Picnic sites</li><li>▪ Group day-use facilities</li><li>▪ Park operations &amp; maintenance facilities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Vehicular parking (capable of accommodating cars, camper vans, recreation vehicles, and horse trailers)</li><li>▪ Restrooms</li><li>▪ Orientation &amp; interpretive elements</li><li>▪ Trailheads &amp; trails</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Reconstructed non-permanent Ohlone village structures &amp; outdoor activity areas</li><li>▪ Restrooms</li><li>▪ Scenic view points</li><li>▪ Interpretive elements outside of Cultural Preserve</li><li>▪ Vehicular parking</li><li>▪ Trailhead &amp; trails</li><li>▪ Permitted trail camps or non-permanent alternative overnight accommodations (with appropriate support facilities)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Trailheads &amp; trails</li><li>▪ Vehicular parking</li><li>▪ Restrooms</li><li>▪ Scenic view points</li><li>▪ Interpretive elements</li><li>▪ Picnic sites</li><li>▪ Trail camps or horse/bicycle trail camps</li><li>▪ Orientation/interpretive &amp; visitor-serving facilities in conjunction with POST</li></ul>



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Photo on reverse: Tour group viewing elephant seals at Año Nuevo Point

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE PARKS

## 1.1 LOCATION AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

This document presents information on Año Nuevo State Natural Reserve (SNR) and Año Nuevo State Park (SP). These parks are in close proximity and have been combined into a single general plan document.

Año Nuevo SNR and Año Nuevo SP are located in San Mateo County, approximately 25 miles south of Half Moon Bay and 25 miles north of Santa Cruz. The parks are in the Santa Cruz Mountains region and are within 65 miles of the major metropolitan centers of San Jose, San Francisco and Oakland. The Santa Cruz Mountains region has many public recreation and natural lands owned by entities such as California State Parks, Santa Cruz County and San Mateo County, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, the California Department of Fish and Game, the Santa Cruz Water Department, the University of California, the Sempervirens Fund, and the Peninsula Open Space Trust. The region also contains private recreation providers, small towns, rural housing, small businesses, agriculture, and timber companies. (See Figure 1.)

## 1.2 SITE CHARACTERISTICS

Año Nuevo SNR and SP preserve environmentally diverse segments of the central California coast. Año Nuevo SNR, on the coastal side of State Highway 1 west of Año Nuevo SP, consists of approximately 1,313 acres of gently sloping marine terrace adjacent to sandy dunes, beaches, and a rocky coastline. Willows grow along several creeks as they come out of the mountains to the east and wind their way across the park to the ocean, including Año Nuevo Creek on the Reserve's southern boundary and Gazos Creek on the Reserve's northern Boundary. Año Nuevo SNR is the site of a major mainland breeding colony of the northern elephant seal. The park's elephant seal interpretive program attracts increasing interest every winter. Elephant seals, sea lions, and other marine mammals come ashore to rest, mate, and give birth on the sand dunes, beaches and offshore islands. It is a unique and unforgettable natural spectacle that thousands



Dune vegetation at Franklin Point, Año Nuevo SNR

of people come to witness each year. A trail to the coast's primary seal area extends from the visitor contact area near Highway 1 to beaches along the Reserve's western-most point, part of a Wildlife Protection Area along the coastal strand. The park's entrance area has public parking and several historic dairy and ranch buildings, some of which have been adapted for modern use. The park's visitor center is housed in the historic Dickerman Barn.

Along the north end of Año Nuevo SNR are several parking areas adjacent to Highway 1, with trailheads providing coastal access across the marine terrace to the cliffs above the rocky shore in the southern part of the park, and the sandy beaches north of Franklin Point. An old burial site at Franklin Point holds the remains of mid-1800s shipwreck victims. On Año Nuevo Island, several structures built in the early 1900s to support a lighthouse facility bear witness to efforts to warn passing ships of the presence of dangerous rocks. The lighthouse itself was decommissioned in 1948 and replaced by an automatic buoy, but the support buildings remain. The island is used by marine mammals and birds for breeding. Its wildlife and ecology are being studied by various research institutions. The island is closed to the public.



Año Nuevo State Park, Lake Elizabeth in foreground

Año Nuevo SP consists of approximately 2,896 acres of land not yet developed for public use. Part of its southern boundary is adjacent to Highway 1 and Año Nuevo SNR. The park's uplands are characterized by second-growth redwood and Douglas-fir forest, oaks, chaparral, and pine on rugged terrain, with mountain streams flowing through canyons on their way to the sea. Lower elevation annual grasslands and coyote brush cover the more gentle terrain to the west, with arroyo willow riparian forest along the creeks, and freshwater marshes and ponds in the lowlands. A small reservoir along Whitehouse Road and a larger reservoir adjacent to the highway, known as Lake Elizabeth, provide water for off-site agricultural crops. The park's four perennial streams support steelhead trout and coho salmon, and its wetlands are habitat for the rare San Francisco garter snake and California red-legged frog. Cultural resources include the remnants of a prehistoric native California Indian village site and a number of 19<sup>th</sup> century dairy ranch structures. The park protects important regional ecological corridors in conjunction with adjacent and nearby public lands.

The majority of streams and creeks in the park's uplands drain into Gazos, Whitehouse, and Cascade creeks. A section of Gazos Creek forms the boundary between Butano SP and Año Nuevo SP, flowing west out of the uplands and eventually entering the ocean near the northern boundary of Año

Nuevo SNR. Whitehouse Creek traverses from east to west through the center Año Nuevo SP then turns south at its western boundary, crossing Año Nuevo SNR as it flows to the ocean. Cascade Creek runs across the southern part of the State Park Highway the State Reserve.

A network of unpaved roads and trails traverses Año Nuevo SP, from Highway 1 to its boundaries shared with Butano SP on the north and Big Basin Redwoods SP on the east. Old Womans Creek Road, which bisects the northern area of the park, and Whitehouse Road allow access by easements for private property owners east of the park. Paved Gazos Creek Road is just north of the park's northern boundary. The park's internal road and trail system offers quiet solitude on open hillsides with spectacular views of the coast, evergreen forest, and canyon slopes; and provides trail access to the adjacent state parks. No formal inland park access or facilities have been established yet. Informal inland hiking, biking and equestrian trail use occurs, however, coming in from adjacent Butano SP, Big Basin Redwoods SP, and adjacent regional natural areas.

### 1.3 PURPOSE ACQUIRED

Año Nuevo SNR was created in 1958 in part to preserve and protect a potentially major breeding ground of the northern elephant seal and to support a recovery of their decimated populations. Elephant seals were hunted close to the point of extinction in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Subsequent to government protection of the species, the first elephant seal sighting on Año Nuevo Island was in 1955. The first pup was born on the island in 1961. Today, more than 20,000 births have been recorded in the Reserve and the number continues to grow annually. Protection of the seals' coastal habitat and the growth of the park's interpretive programs have allowed many visitors the recreational and educational benefits of observing these animals in their natural environment, further encouraging preservation of coastal ecosystems.

Over time, land has been acquired for state parks in the Santa Cruz Mountains region to help protect California's diminishing native redwood and coastal habitats and to provide recreational opportunities for the state's growing population. Año Nuevo SP was acquired to preserve and protect substantial acreage on the western slope of the Santa Cruz Mountains inland from Año Nuevo Point. Much of this land was previously part of a large dairy known as the



Cascade Ranch. Several private efforts to acquire and develop the property in the 1970s and early 1980s spurred California State Parks to acquire the largest portion of the property in 1985, with assistance from private non-profit organizations, private individuals, and the California state legislature. Specific reference was made at the time to the potential of the property to respond to the high demand for camping facilities on the San Mateo coast.

An approximately 400-acre parcel containing historic Cascade Ranch buildings was acquired in 1986 to preserve the ranch buildings and interpret the history of this early dairy and agricultural operation to the public.

## 1.4 SENSE OF PLACE

Each of California's state parks inspire a unique sense of place. Most visitors begin to sense the essence of a park when they first enter the park environment – the feeling of being in a special place set aside in perpetuity to preserve and protect a set of extraordinary values. This awareness of a certain place often leads to a sense of belonging and reconnection. State parks offer visitors opportunities to reconnect to the natural world and our cultural heritage, providing visitors with lasting impressions and memorable experiences.

Various areas of the Natural Reserve have differences in character and provide different senses of place. These experiences are found respectively in the entrance area off Highway 1, the Wildlife Protection Area on the western coastal strand, and the area north of the Wildlife Protection Area. In addition to variations in site characteristics, there are frequent changes in weather conditions, and fog often adds a mystique and dynamic spectacle to many park areas. Views of the ocean are common throughout all areas of the park.

The Wildlife Protection Area inspires visitors with spectacular vistas of the ocean and sky and the sight of large populations of marine mammals on the sandy beaches. Visitors can take guided tours to see elephant seals and other marine animals in breeding season and take away powerful impressions of the native coastal environment and the flow of life. A tour of the park's visitor center complex contributes to a sense of the complexity and interconnectedness of the natural resources and cultural history. Trails take the visitor out into the brisk salty air to head in the direction of the sand dunes and seals. Grasses and willows stabilize the sand and allow other native

plants to flourish. The salty marine winds and barking of the seals and sea lions fill the senses of visitors and, along with many other seaside impressions, impart the essence of the coastal environment.

Cooling fogs and salt-laden winds extend into mountainous uplands and canyons, where increased precipitation supports animals and plants adapted to these conditions, including coast redwoods at the higher elevations. When clouds and fog are absent, the sun bakes the hills, especially on the park's south-facing slopes and ridge tops covered in knobcone pine and chaparral. Visitors exploring the hills and canyons supporting these ecosystems can come away with a renewed awareness of the diversity of life.

Different areas of Año Nuevo SP vary considerably in character, and create different visitor experiences. The Cascade Ranch area, with historic ranch buildings on the flat coastal terrace, evokes a sense of the rural lifestyle of the past. North of Cascade Ranch, Lake Elizabeth, a constructed reservoir, is an open expanse of water surrounded by dark green vegetation that contrasts with the surrounding summer golden grass on the hillsides. The Lake Elizabeth area offers little protection from ocean winds and intense sun and visitors can hear traffic noise due to the proximity of the highway.

Farther north, unpaved Whitehouse Road extends from the highway to the park's interior. Visitors who travel this road quickly become aware of the subtle transitions and marked differences in vegetation, geology and views as they move from the coastal terrace to the upper reaches of the Santa Cruz Mountains. This experience is doubled when the route is reversed and different perceptions and views come into play during the descent back to Highway 1.

Whitehouse Road continues to areas that become more protected from the elements as taller vegetation appears along canyons. A second-growth redwood forest extends over the mountainsides on the east side of the park, where cooling fogs often envelop the trees and lend a sense of mystery to the landscape. Between stands of redwoods, visitors can see spectacular views of the parkland below and the ocean in the distance.

Año Nuevo SP and SNR represent the continuation of important legacies that directly and specifically relate to the preservation of sense of place. They were created in part to encourage and protect natural ecological processes and contain special resources that are supported and preserved for future generations. The acquisition of these parks was

The variety of character in different areas of Año Nuevo SNR and SP creates a variety of different visitor experiences.



inspired by the beauty of the coast and the Santa Cruz Mountains environment. The parks continue to delight and inspire those who visit them.

## 1.5 PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The general plan provides the framework for a park unit's resource stewardship, interpretation, visitor use, operation, and development.

The general plan is the primary management document for a park within the California State Park System, establishing its purpose and a management direction for the future. By providing a defined purpose and vision with long-term goals and guidelines, it provides the framework for a unit's resource stewardship, interpretation, visitor use, operation, and development. Subsequently, this established framework helps guide daily decision-making and serves as the basis for developing more detailed management and site-specific project plans.

This general plan was developed to serve as a long range management tool that provides guidelines for fulfilling the purposes for acquisition of the Año Nuevo SNR and SP properties. This document does not attempt to provide detailed management or development proposals, but rather provides conceptual direction and parameters for future management and development actions. Specific objectives and strategies for implementation of the general plan are intended to be developed in subsequent planning efforts as they are needed, including the preparation of management plans and specific project plans.

This general plan document was prepared by California State Parks to satisfy the requirements the California Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 5002.2. The PRC specifies that a general plan will be prepared prior to development of any new facilities and shall consist of elements of discussion that will evaluate and define the proposed management of resources, land uses, facilities, concessions, operation of the unit, and any environmental impacts. The Año Nuevo SP General Plan is submitted to the State Park and Recreation Commission for consideration and final approval.

### COMBINED GENERAL PLAN / EIR

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 establishes a requirement for state agencies to analyze and disclose the potential environmental effects of a proposed action. The environmental impact report (EIR), as prepared by state and local governments, is usually a stand-alone document intended to meet the requirements of CEQA.

However, CEQA also encourages options to avoid needless redundancy and duplication, such as combining general plans and EIRs (CEQA Guidelines Section 15166) and the use of tiering, a process where a lead agency prepares a series of EIRs, progressing from general concerns to more site-specific evaluations with the preparation of each new document (CEQA Guidelines Section 15152). When the lead agency combines a general plan and an EIR all CEQA requirements must be covered and document must identify where the requirements are met. Please see **Appendix A** for a table indicating the location of required elements of the EIR within this document.

This general plan also serves as a first-tier EIR as defined in Section 15166 of the CEQA guidelines. The analysis of broad environmental matters found within the Environmental Analysis section will be a reference for future environmental documents that will provide more detailed information and analysis for site-specific developments and projects.

### **TIERED CEQA ANALYSIS**

This Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR serves as a first-tier EIR, as defined in Section 15166 of the CEQA Guidelines. Individual and/or site-specific projects and appropriate CEQA compliance will follow the Preliminary General Plan/EIR. The analysis of broad potential environmental impacts discussed in the Environmental Analysis section of this document will provide the basis for future second-level environmental review, which will provide more detailed information and analysis for site-specific developments and projects. These projects include facility development projects and future studies. Planning and feasibility studies for park management, recreation, and resource protection are ongoing.

This document provides discussion of the probable impacts of future development and established goals, guidelines, and objectives to implementing such development in a manner which will avoid or minimize such environmental impacts. This approach is consistent with a tiered approach to EIRs.

Where a proposed project covers a wide spectrum of action, from the adoption of a general plan, which is by definition tentative and subject to further refinement, to activities with a site-specific impact, CEQA requires that “environmental impact reports shall be tiered whenever feasible[.]” (Public Resources Code sec. 21093(b).) Tiering is defined as “the coverage of general matters and environmental effects in an environmental impact report prepared for a policy, plan, program, or ordinance followed by narrower or site-specific

environmental impact reports....” (PRC sec. 21068.5; CEQA Guidelines sec. 15385.) While a tiered EIR may not defer all consideration of impacts to a point in the future, it can legitimately indicate that more detailed studies and project-specific impacts may be considered in future environmental documents. Generally, the courts have recognized that environmental studies at the general plan level will be general. It has been found acceptable that a more detailed analysis be considered later in the process.

The level of detail addressed in the Environmental Analysis section is comparable to the level of detail provided in the land use proposals of the plan. What is critical, and what is set forth in the plan, is the formulation and eventual adoption of a set of goals and guidelines designed to minimize and mitigate impacts that might occur from the implementation of projects under the General Plan.

For example, the general plan designates park property into land classifications, such as natural preserves and cultural preserves, and additional management zones. Goals and guidelines are proposed for each of these zones which provide conceptual parameters for future management actions.

## 1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

**Chapter 1 – Introduction to the Parks** gives an overview of the characteristics of both Año Nuevo SNR and Año Nuevo SP.

**Chapter 2 - Existing Conditions** identifies the natural, cultural, interpretive, recreation, and aesthetic resources of each park, including a discussion of the demographic trends in California that are relevant to the planning process, as well as the systemwide and regional planning influences. This information provides the foundation to understand specific park issues.

**Chapter 3 – Issues** describes current challenges and planning issues facing the parks.

**Chapter 4 – Park Plan** presents Año Nuevo SNR and Año Nuevo SP as a single park. Purpose and vision statements describe the park’s significance and future potential. Parkwide and area-specific goals and guidelines address the existing issues and provide park management and development proposals. This section also includes a description of the adaptive management process that will be

used to maintain resources and positive visitor experiences at the park. The Park Plan is considered the EIR preferred alternative.

**Chapter 5 - Environmental Analysis** discloses the preferred alternative's effect on the environment, including any significant and potentially significant effects that may result from implementing the general plan. Potential mitigation measures and alternatives to the proposed project are also discussed in this section. This is considered a Program EIR which will inform decision-makers and the public about the environmental consequences of the adoption of the general plan, consistent with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act and CEQA guidelines.

## 1.7 SUBSEQUENT PLANNING

Major programs and projects implemented during the lifespan of the General Plan will require additional planning, such as management plans or specific project plans. Management plans define the specific objectives, methodologies and/or designs for accomplishing management goals as discussed in the general plan. Occurring on an as-needed basis, management plans typically focus on specific management topics, goals, or issues. Typical examples include resource management plans, trails plans, operations plans, interpretive plans, concession plans, and facility development plans.

Specific project plans are the detailed implementation plans needed to accomplish specific projects. For example, specific project plans would include design concepts, site plans, and details for rehabilitation and development of public use facilities for the Año Nuevo SP Cascade Ranch area. Future planning efforts may include the preparation of specific resource management plans to protect sensitive resources or the development of site-specific plans for new facilities.

Subsequent planning efforts also include preparing project-specific environmental compliance documents to implement management plans and proposed park development projects. These compliance documents will tier off and be consistent with the General Plan's Program EIR. The General Plan may also be amended if significant new acquisitions are added to the existing park or if other circumstances render parts of this General Plan inapplicable.

More detailed levels of planning will be required for major programs and projects implemented during the lifespan of this general plan.



## 1.8 THE PLANNING PROCESS

Año Nuevo SNR was one of nine state parks that went through a regional planning process in the late 1970s. This effort produced the San Mateo Coast Area General Plan which was approved by the California State Park and Recreation Commission in 1979. Año Nuevo SP is a relatively recent addition to the State Park System and does not have a prior general plan.

This updated and comprehensive planning effort was initiated to ensure a long-term and visionary general plan and is commensurate with the parks' significance within the region as well as in the State Park System. This general plan was prepared by a multi-disciplinary team from the Department's Santa Cruz District, Santa Cruz Mountains Sector, the Northern Service Center, and Planning Division in Sacramento. The team conducted field investigations, research, interviews, and surveys to compile a planning information base. This work included specific information related to the land, water, vegetation, wildlife, habitats, aesthetics, the area's prehistory and history, surrounding land uses, existing interpretation, recreation patterns and trends, and visitor use patterns and desires. This planning effort examined the area within park ownership as well as the surrounding region.

An initial public meeting was held at the Pescadero School Office on August 26, 2003 to inform the public about the park's resources and to identify public concerns and issues regarding planning for the park. Newsletters provided information about the planning process and explained or clarified major issues and planning team proposals. Planning information was also made available to the public on the Department's website. An August 2003 General Plan public meeting for Big Basin Redwoods State Park provided mapping information on Año Nuevo State Natural Reserve, Año Nuevo State Park, and Butano State Park.

The planning process was put on hold for two years due to system-wide staffing and budget challenges. When State Parks planning team members were back on the job, they gathered and analyzed extensive resource data on the parks, assessed visitor and area recreation needs, and identified park and regional issues and opportunities. From this analysis, goals, guidelines, and proposals were developed.

A subsequent public open house at the Pescadero School Office was held on December 8, 2007 to share highlights and



maps of the draft Año Nuevo State Park and Butano State Park General Plans, provide updated planning process information, and receive public input on plan proposals. Newsletters again provided information about the planning process and explained or clarified major issues and draft General Plan proposals. Planning information was also made available to the public on the Department's website.

This active participation by the public, organizations, local government, and other agencies in the development of the park's concepts, goals, and proposals influenced the direction and content of the General Plan.

## THE PLANNING HIERARCHY

The following planning hierarchy provides direction for the future of Año Nuevo SP:

- **Department Mission:** The mission sets the fundamental parameters within which California State Parks acquires, plans, and manages its 278 park units.
- **Classification:** In addition to the Department's mission, park management and development is further directed by park unit classification as specified by the California Public Resources Code.
- **Declaration of Purpose:** A broad statement of direction that is unique to the park. The Declaration of Purpose required by Public Resources Code, Section 5019.50 is determined by the park's prime resources and recreation opportunities within the larger context of the State Park System.
- **Regional Planning Considerations for California State Parks Located in the Santa Cruz Mountains:** Developed in response to a regional analysis, these considerations address existing issues, regional resource management strategies, and recreation trends. Furthermore, they provide ongoing guidance to achieve the long-term vision for California State Parks located in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The regional vision provides a philosophical direction and serves as a guiding statement for the desired condition of these parks.
- **Park Vision:** The vision statement for each park is a view of the desired future conditions. It expresses what the park should ultimately be and look like as well as what kinds of visitor experiences should be available in the future.
- **Parkwide Management Goals and Guidelines:** Topical guidance whose scope is relevant for the entire park.

The Mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



These goals and guidelines were developed in response to an evaluation of existing conditions and are intended to address existing issues, foreseeable trends/patterns, and provide ongoing guidance for the incremental actions that will be taken over time to realize the long-term vision for the parks.

- **Planning Zones:** Geographic areas of a park that are characterized by specific types of resource conditions, visitor experiences, and land use concepts.
- **Specific Area Goals and Guidelines:** Management goals and guidelines that clarify the proposals for a specific area.

### INTERAGENCY AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Participation by pertinent agencies and organizations was sought throughout the planning process to ensure a broad consideration of concerns and interests as well as compliance or consistency with relevant policies, regulations, and plans. Early consultation with agencies and Ohlone Tribal members on prominent issues such as endangered species, sensitive habitats, cultural resources, and recreation needs was conducted to ensure that their input would have timely consideration during the planning process. These agencies and other organizations included the California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, California Department of Transportation, the Sempervirens Fund, the Peninsula Open Space Trust, and Save-the-Redwoods League.